

Help us fulfil our potential

*Editor Anne Kidd chats to
Terry Mortimer who became National President of Catholic Cursillo in
England and Wales in March 2006*

Tell us something about yourself...

I am 65 years old and married to Trish. This is my second marriage. Between us we have 8 children and 17 grandchildren. We live in Chesterfield and worship at Annunciation and at St Hugh's in Chesterfield.

I am very interested in sport and still play competitive table tennis. I inherited my love of sport from my late father who was an army PT instructor. I also enjoy reading, particularly thrillers and autobiographies.

I was in the police force and retired with the rank of Inspector after 12 years with Essex Police. I then took employment with a firm of solicitors who specialised in Criminal Law. My role was to handle the most serious cases such as murder, robbery, rape, conspiracies and my own speciality, serious fraud. I had worked in that field for 30 years in the police.

When did you make your Cursillo Weekend? Did it have any effect on your life?

I made my Cursillo in 1993. A fellow parishioner invited Trish and I to attend what we believed was a retreat. I had never heard of Cursillo and when I asked my sponsor to explain what it was about he replied, "You will find out when you get there". I suppose I trusted his judgment.

It would not be right for me to say that I found the Weekend all it should have been. To me and the other participants it seemed to be more for the benefit of the Leaders than ourselves! However, the love shown to us, and the inspiring talks impressed me, and I could see the movement's potential. The following year I was asked to join the team at a Weekend and on that occasion I realised how wonderful a Weekend could be.

You are fairly new to Cursillo leadership. Do you think that being thrown in at the deep end has its drawbacks? I don't think this presents any drawbacks as I have always been ready to take on responsibility. I can view situations afresh and am always ready to listen to those who have more experience. With this balance I am confident I will be of value to the movement.

Much is written about Cursillo's charism—what do you feel that it is? Cursillo is an active and constructive renewal movement enabling those who attend the Weekends to take a fresh look at their faith and their role within the Church, thus helping them to reach their full potential.

Do you feel that Cursillo is currently doing this effectively? I believe that it has been successful but there is so much more we can do. We need to attract more candidates, more young people and more clergy. To make it more effective each and every Cursillista should accept that we all have a role to attract new members.

What about the dearth of young people - how could we attract more?

We ought to invite them to Weekends, help them with their group reunions and encourage them to attract more of their own age group. Additionally we should invite Youth Leaders to attend a Cursillo, and finally having attracted them we should involve them as Leaders. It is really a case of being persistent, patient and praying for young people to come on board.

How can we encourage people in the movement to take on leadership roles? Do we need to be more flexible and imaginative in our use of the method?

To begin with new members could be encouraged to be involved in the planning of Ultreyas and leading group reunions. Of course, we need to be able to recognise potential leaders and invite them to join a team. Some people are ready to take on leadership roles at an early stage while others may need to be gently coaxed into taking up responsibilities and at much slower pace, perhaps leading the rosary or preparing a meditation.

Do you think the name Cursillo or use of Spanish words is off putting?

I would not be in favour of changing the name Cursillo although I know British people are wary of foreign names. Some foreign words could be dropped without causing too much of a problem. However, as I keep reminding people, the widely accepted St Vincent de Paul Society started abroad, and Cursillo need be no different.

How about the clergy—how can we get them on board?

One of the great problems is the shortage of priests. We could be more pro-active in getting our message out to priests and in particular our bishops. My own view is that the 4th Day Movements like Cursillo will have a more active role in the future of the Church.

During your time as President have you any particular thing you would like to do or encourage others to do?

As President I hope to encourage good relations with our Anglican friends in Cursillo, our Methodist friends in Walk to Emmaus, and with Kairos (in prisons), Kairos Outside and Tres Dies. Above all I would like to see Cursillo established in those dioceses where we currently do not have a presence.

Give us any instance of when you have been able to use your own particular gifts to help bring others close to God.

I recall in my career dealing with many clients facing serious charges who had been on remand in prison for many months awaiting trial. When taking their instructions you establish a rapport over these months and sometimes the question of faith comes up. On one occasion a client asked me for a rosary and on another occasion I gave a book of the Psalms to a client on trial for murder. He held this during the trial. Eventually he was found not guilty. I feel on both these occasions we were sharing each other's beliefs and were drawn closer to God.

Several years ago I went to take instructions from a deaf and dumb client called Porter, charged with rape. After explaining that the interpreter I had with me was there to assist me with this deaf and dumb client, we were assigned a room, and the prison officer yelled out "Porter!" He repeated this loud call three times with a final, "Porter! Are you deaf or something?" which caused great mirth. I suppose it made me realise the importance of listening carefully, which of course the prison officer should have done. In my view, listening to God is just as important as prayer.